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PATENT

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IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

Inventor: Vallabh) Examiner: Smith
Serial No: 09/598,196) Art Unit: 3625
Filing Date: June 21, 2000)

For: AUTOMATED METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR MERCHANDIZE
TRANSACTIONS

CERTIFICATE UNDER 37 C.F.R. § 1.8(a)

I hereby certify that this correspondence, and any enclosures referenced herein, is being deposited with the United States Postal Service as first class mail in an envelope addressed to: Mail Stop Appeal Brief - Patents, Assistant Commissioner for Patents, PO Box 1450, Alexandria, VA 22313-1450

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Rajesh Vallabh

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APPELLANT'S BRIEF PURSUANT TO 37 C.F.R. § 1.192(a)

In response to the Notice of Appeal received by the Patent Office January 20, 2004,

Appellant hereby submits his brief as follows:

Real Party In Interest

The real party in interest is Rajesh Vallabh, the applicant.

Related Appeals and Interferences

There are no known appeals or interferences that will directly affect or be effected by or have a bearing on the Board's decision in the pending appeal.

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Status of Claims

Claims 1-61 are pending. This appeal involves each of these claims.

Status of Amendments

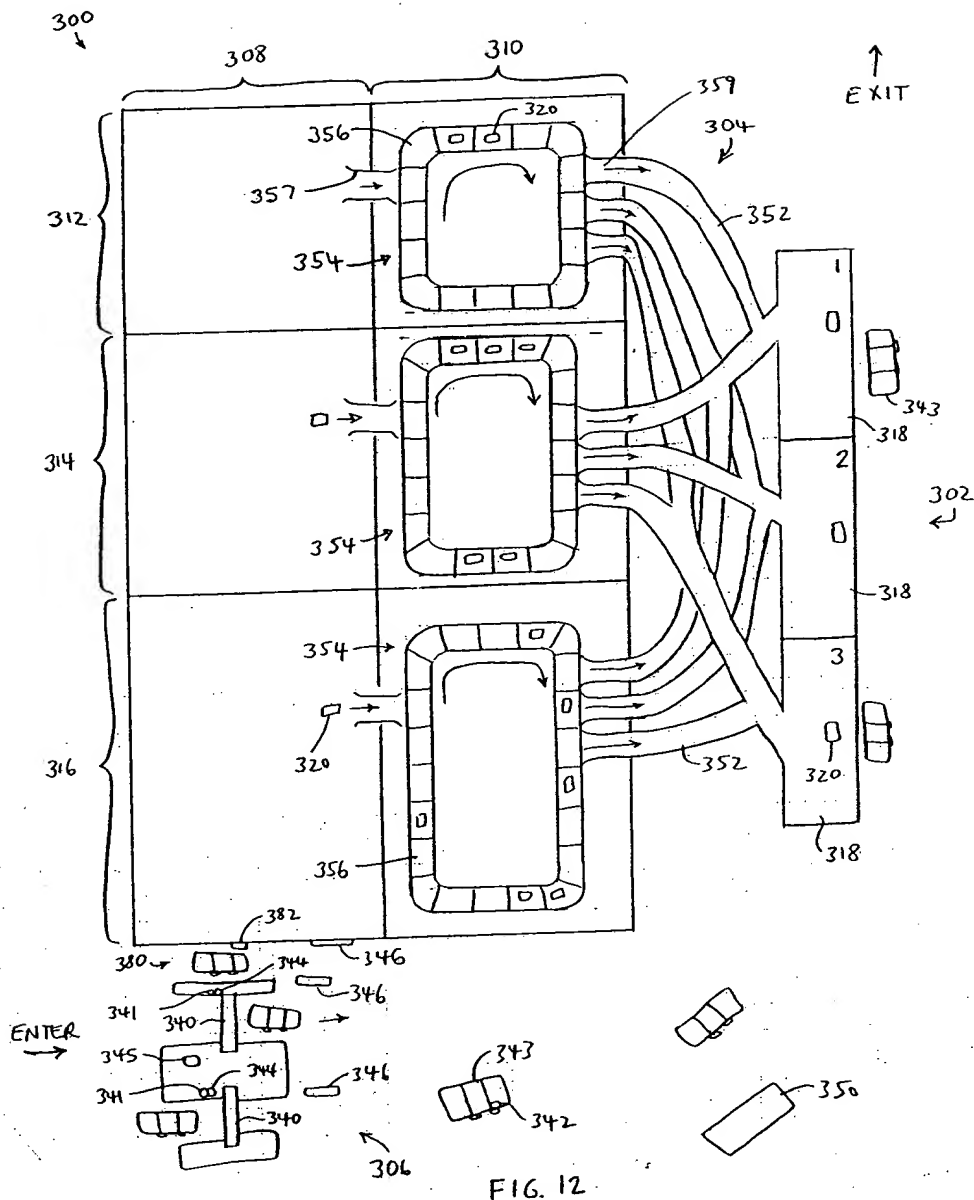
All amendments have been entered. The application was not amended after issuance of the final office action on October 15, 2003.

Summary of Invention

The present application is directed to an improved method and system for selling products such as, e.g., groceries. Products can be ordered by a customer online and thereafter very quickly and efficiently provided to the customer for pickup, allowing for high throughput order fulfillment.

Various methods and systems for selling products (i.e., merchandize or goods) are possible in accordance with embodiments of the invention. As an example, Fig. 12 of the present application is reproduced below.

FIGURE 12 is a simplified illustration of a non-limiting example of an ordered item pickup system in accordance with one or more embodiments of the invention. (Various modifications to the details of this example are possible.) The system of Fig. 12 can include a storage area 300, a vehicle loading area 302, and a transfer mechanism 304 for transferring products stored in the storage area 300 to the loading area 302. The vehicle loading area 302 can include multiple loading stations 318 at which customers can pick up ordered goods. The system can also include a customer detection area 306 for sensing the arrival of a customer to pickup his or her goods.



The Fig. 12 system receives online orders for goods from a customer. The order is received from the customer while the customer is at a location remote from the premises of the pickup location (e.g., from the customer's home or a vehicle the customer is driving at some remote location). After receiving the order, the ordered goods are readied for pickup. This readying process can include identifying and collecting the ordered goods stored in the storage area 300. Upon arrival of the customer at the premises to pickup his or her ordered goods, the

goods are moved from the storage area using the transfer mechanism 304 to the loading area 302 for pickup.

The customer detection area 306 can be used to preferably automatically detect approaching customers. (The detection area 306 can, e.g., have one or more customer detection and identification stations 340, optionally of the type used, e.g., in automated-highway toll collection stations.) Responsive to detection of a customer, the system locates the goods ordered by the customer (which have been readied for pickup) and initiates transfer of the goods from the storage area to the loading area. The system can also optionally dynamically assign the customer a particular loading station 318 to which he or she can drive to pickup the ordered goods. (The particular loading station 318 selected can be based, e.g., on which station is less utilized at that time.) The system initiates transfer of the goods ordered to the selected loading station 318 such that preferably by the time the customer arrives at the assigned loading station (or shortly thereafter) the ordered groceries are available to be loaded in the vehicle. The system thereby provides customers with a quick and convenient way to purchase products.

Issues

- A. Whether Claims 1, 2 and 6-11 are unpatentable under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) over U.S. Patent No. 5,158,155 issued to Domain et al. ("Domain") in view of U.S. Patent No. 5,186,281 issued to Jenkins ("Jenkins") and U.S. Patent No. 6,246,998 issued to Matsumori ("Matsumori").
- B. Whether Claims 3-5 are unpatentable under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being over Domain, Jenkins, Matsumori in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,026,375 issued to Hall et al. ("Hall").
- C. Whether Claims 12, 18, 19, 26, 29, 30, 32, 33, 35, 40-45, 48, 49, 51, 53, 54, 58, and 59 are unpatentable under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) over Domain in view of Jenkins.
- D. Whether Claims 13-16 and 50 are unpatentable under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) over Domain in view of Jenkins and Matsumori.

E. Whether Claims 17 and 22-25 are unpatentable under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) over Domain and Jenkins in view of Hall.

F. Whether Claim 20 is unpatentable under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) over Domain and Jenkins in view of Matsumori.

G. Whether Claims 21, 27, 28, 31, 34, 36-39, 57, 60 and 61 are unpatentable under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Domain and Jenkins in view of Ruppert.

H. Whether Claims 46, 55 and 56 are unpatentable under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) over Domain and Jenkins in view of Hall.

I. Whether Claim 47 is unpatentable under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) over Domain and Jenkins in view of Hall, and further in view of an Official Notice.

J. Whether Claim 52 is unpatentable under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) over Domain and Jenkins further in view of Matsumori.

Grouping of Claims

Claims 1 and 4-10 stand or fall together.

Claims 12-48 stand or fall together.

Claims 49-61 stand or fall together.

Argument

Claims 1, 2 and 6-11 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Domain in view of Jenkins and Matsumori. Claims 3-5 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Domain, Jenkins, Matsumori in view of Hall. Claims 12, 18, 19, 26, 29, 30, 32, 33, 35, 40-45, 48, 49, 51, 53, 54, 58, and 59 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Domain in view of Jenkins. Claims 13-16 and 50 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Domain in view of Jenkins and Matsumori. Claims 17 and 22-25 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Domain

and Jenkins in view of Hall. Claim 20 stands rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Domain and Jenkins in view of Matsumori. Claims 21, 27, 28, 31, 34, 36-39, 57, 60 and 61 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Domain and Jenkins in view of Ruppert. Claims 46, 55 and 56 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Domain and Jenkins in view of Hall. Claim 47 stands rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Domain and Jenkins in view of Hall, and further in view of an Official Notice. Claim 52 stands rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Domain and Jenkins further in view of Matsumori. For the reasons set forth below, these rejections should be reversed.

I. Independent Claim 1 is Patentable Over the Combination Of Domain, Jenkins and Matsumori

The two main references cited by the Examiner were Domain and Jenkins. Domain discloses a so-called "vendors' structural complex" that includes a customer order station for receiving customer orders and a plurality of pick-up stations accessible to customers in their vehicles where the merchandize ordered can be picked up as shown in Fig. 1 of the patent reproduced below.

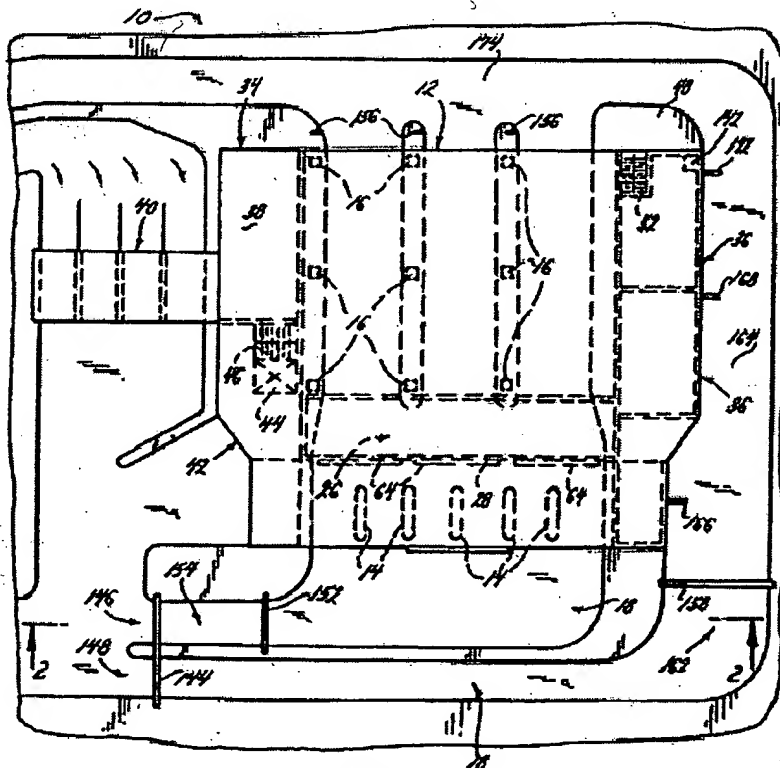
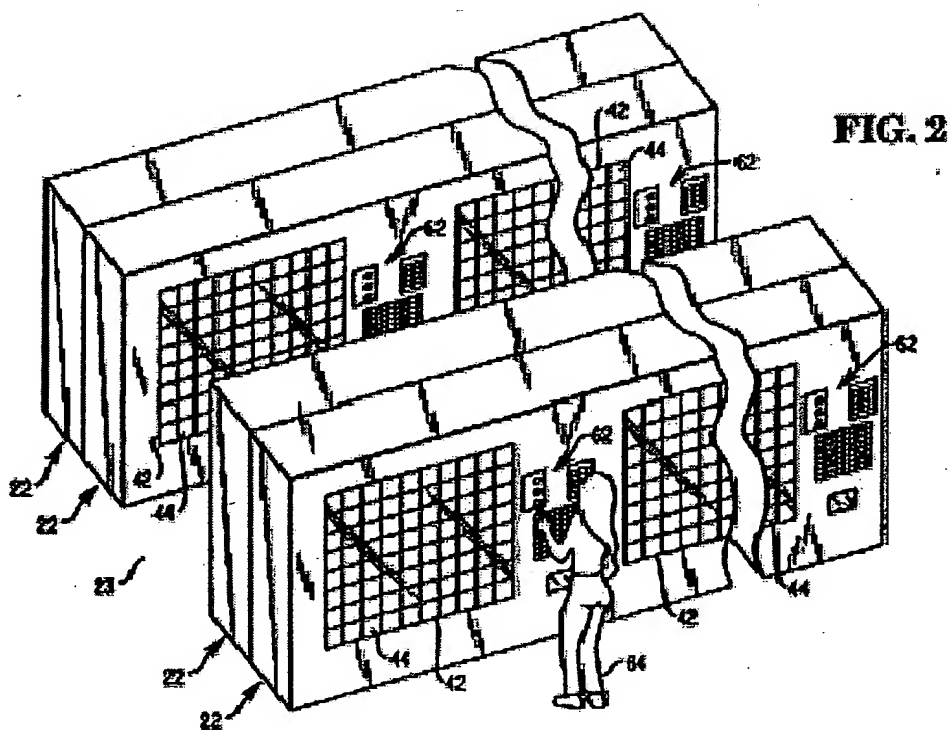
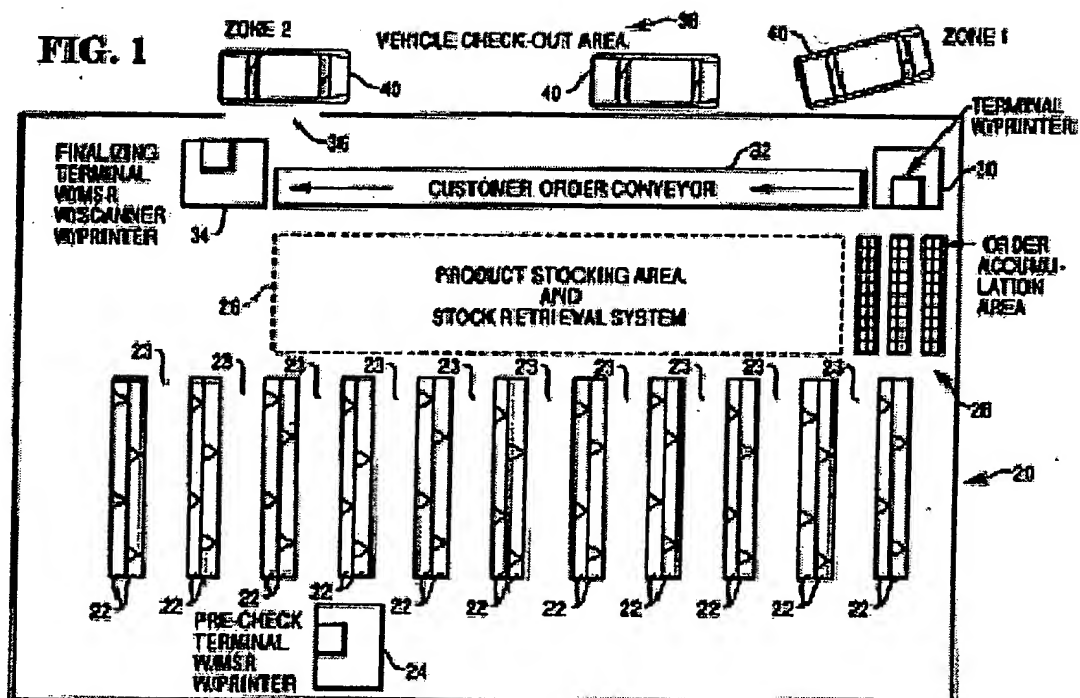


FIG. 1

Domain's customers drive up to one of several order stations 14 in the complex where they verbally communicate their orders to an order clerk, who then electronically enters the order. The order station 14 includes a two-way communication system that enables both audio and visual communication between the customer and the order clerk. Domain requires interaction between the customer and the order clerk at the time of order placement. For instance, Domain teaches that when the customer makes a liquor purchase or pays for his or her purchase by check, the order clerk must visually verify the identity of the customer (col. 4, lines 55-59). Each order station 14 is associated with three pick up stations 16, and the order clerk sends the customer to one of these pick up stations 16 to pick up his or her ordered products.

The other primary reference cited by the Examiner, Jenkins, discloses a complicated (and seemingly impractical) retail checkout system in which customers have to physically walk to a product display area (shown in Fig. 2, which is reproduced below) to inspect product samples and make product selections, then walk to a pre-check terminal 24 to collect a receipt, and finally get into and drive their vehicles to a vehicle checkout area to pick up selected products (shown in Fig. 1, which is also reproduced below). The checkout area includes two "zones": Zone 1 and Zone 2. In Zone 1, an employee (on foot) carrying a wireless transceiver communicates the order of the queue of incoming customer vehicles to another employee at terminal station 30 such that ordered articles are placed on customer order conveyor 32 in accordance with the order of incoming vehicles in Zone 1. (col. 3, lines 34-44 and col. 6, lines 5-33). Zone 2 is the end of the conveyor 32 and is the final checkout area having a so-called finalizing terminal 34, at which the customer presents his or her credit card to the operator, who then charges the card for the purchase. The customer's order is then loaded into his or her vehicle.



The Examiner also cited Matsumori for teaching an Internet based ordering system allowing customers to place grocery orders online. Matsumori is not cited for and does not disclose how customers can pick up ordered products. Matsumori only teaches that a customer's frozen foods order can be packaged and maintained in a freezer section until either the customer arrives to pick-up the order or until the store delivery service is ready to deliver the order. There is no teaching or any suggestion of any automated grocery pickup system.

The present application is directed to an improved method and system for selling products such as, e.g., groceries. Products can be ordered by a customer online and thereafter very quickly and efficiently provided to the customer for pickup, allowing for high throughput order fulfillment. Independent Claim 1 of the application is directed to a method of selling groceries, which includes the steps of:

receiving an online order from a customer for grocery products the customer desires to pick up at a given location, said order being received from the customer while the customer is at a location remote from said given location;

electronically processing payment information for said order;

retrieving said grocery products from a storage area containing a plurality of such products and maintaining said retrieved grocery products in generally the same temperature conditions as said products were kept in the storage area to inhibit spoilage of said products;

detecting arrival including a generally unique identifier of said customer a predetermined distance from said given location after retrieving said grocery products;

dynamically selecting one of a plurality of loading areas at said given location based on availability and directing said customer to said selected loading area; and

moving said grocery products to said selected loading area for customer pickup responsive to detection of said customer.

The cited references, including Domain and Jenkins, do not disclose or even suggest a number of steps of Claim 1.

First, the Examiner relies on Domain for disclosing the step of receiving an online order from a customer for grocery products the customer desires to pick up at a given location, said order being received from the customer while the customer is at a location remote from said

given location. Domain, however, does not disclose or in any way suggest this step. As indicated above, Domain has designated order stations that customers use for ordering products. The order stations, which are staffed with order clerks, are located at the complex or premises where the products are picked up, and not remote from the complex or premises. As previously mentioned, Domain requires that customers interact with the order clerks in placing their orders. Customers must verbally identify products desired, and the order clerks then electronically enter the orders. The order clerks must visually verify the identity of customers, e.g., when the customer purchases liquor items or pays by a check. Once the order clerks electronically enter the orders, they are sent to particular vendors at the complex to prepare the order.

Domain does not disclose or suggest receiving any online order from a customer, much less from a remote location. The Examiner first states that Domain teaches this step since the customer's order is placed by an order clerk through a primary computer via a microprocessor terminal. The Examiner contends that the customer order is thus received by a vendor online. This, however, does not satisfy the claim language, which requires receiving an online order from a customer for grocery products the customer desires to pick up at a given location, said order being received from the customer while the customer is at a location remote from said given location. In Domain, the customer does not send an online order to anyone. There are no online orders from the customer to the order clerk, and no orders whatsoever from the customer to the vendor.

The Examiner also states that Domain discloses that orders that have been submitted by telephone or facsimile may also be picked up by customers, and that this variation is another form of receiving an online order from a customer. Neither ordering method, however, is receiving an online order from a customer. The term 'online' is well known to mean electronically connected to a computer network or accessible by computer. For example, as indicated in the specification of the present application (including at page 4, line 18 to page 5, line 23), customers can use various types of computer client machines for placing online orders including, e.g., personal computers and wireless hand-held devices. In Domain, customer orders are received either (1) verbally via an on-site two-way audio and visual communication system or (2) by telephone or facsimile. The clerk receiving the order after hearing it or reading it then

manually enters the received order at a computer terminal. In none of these cases is the customer order received online. While the order clerk himself or herself might be considered to be online when entering the customer order at his or her terminal, he or she does not in any way receive any online order from the customer.

Domain would be incompatible with and teaches away from combination with Matsumori, which discloses an Internet based ordering system that receives online orders. Such an Internet based ordering system would, as indicated above, preclude the visual verification of the customer required by Domain when placing the order. Furthermore, there is no indication in Domain as to how or why any Internet based ordering system could or should be implemented in its vendors' structural complex.

Second, as the Examiner acknowledged, Domain does not disclose or suggest detecting arrival including a generally unique identifier of the customer a predetermined distance from the given location after retrieving said grocery products. The Examiner, however, contends that Jenkins discloses this step, presumably at either its Zone 1 or Zone 2 described above. This combination of teachings of Jenkins and Domain is however simply an impermissible hindsight combination by the Examiner. To combine the teachings of two references, there must be some suggestion or incentive for the combination. There is no such suggestion or incentive here. With respect to the Zone 1 teaching, Jenkins teaches that an employee on foot carrying a wireless transceiver communicates the order of customer queuing to another employee at terminal station 30 such that ordered articles are placed on customer order conveyor 32 in accordance with queuing of incoming vehicles. (col. 3, lines 34-44 and col. 6, lines 5-33). Thus, Jenkins teaches that the sole purpose of this process of the employee indicating the order of customer queuing is such that ordered merchandise placed on the single customer conveyor of the single pickup area is in the same order of the customer vehicle queue. As previously mentioned, Jenkins requires customers to walk to a product display area (see Fig. 2 of Jenkins) to make product selections, and then go to a pre-check terminal 24 to collect a receipt, and only thereafter can they drive their vehicles to a vehicle checkout. Orders placed at terminal 24 are not necessarily in the same order as the customer queue at the pick up area since different customers will take more or less time to get to their vehicles and drive to the pick up area. Accordingly, Jenkins uses an

employee for the sole purpose to determine and indicate the order of the customer vehicle queue. This is simply not an issue in Domain. As mentioned above, in Domain, customers drive up to an order station where they verbally communicate their orders to an order clerk, who then electronically enters the order. Each order station is associated with three pick up stations, and the order clerk sends the customer to one of the three pick up stations to pick up his or her ordered products. As customers remain in their vehicles, and they drive immediately to pick up ordered products, it is highly unlikely, if even at all possible, that the order of the customers arriving to pick up their products will be different from what has been entered by the order clerk. Accordingly, there is no need whatsoever in Domain of having an employee on foot carrying a wireless transceiver communicating the order of customer queuing to another employee at terminal station 30 as specified in Jenkins. Customer queuing order is simply not an issue in Domain. One skilled in the art would see no reason to add such an employee to the system of Domain, which would serve to perhaps to only delay the pick up process, and make the process unnecessarily costly for no apparent reason.

As previously mentioned, Jenkins discloses Zone 2, which is the final checkout area having finalizing terminal 34 at which the customer provides his or her credit card to the operator, who charges the card for the purchase. This teaching is also not combinable with Domain. There would be no reason to provide such a final checkout area in Domain since payment for the products in Domain has already been made at the customer order station. Recall that Domain requires visualization of the customer, e.g., for customer payment by check. Again, one skilled in the art would have no motivation whatsoever to make this combination of teachings. In any event, Zone 2 is the pickup location, and not a predetermined location from the pickup location. The claim specifies detecting arrival including a generally unique identifier of the customer a predetermined distance from the given pickup location. Therefore, even if the Zone 2 teaching could be properly combined with Domain, the claim language would not be met.

The Examiner contends that it would have been obvious to include in Domain detecting arrival including a generally unique identifier of a customer in order to ensure that the order is properly matched to the orderee, and to ensure that the customer receiving a liquor item was the same customer who placed the liquor order. As indicated above, in Domain, each order station is

associated with three pick up stations, and the order clerk sends the customer to one of the three pick up stations to pick up his or her ordered products. As customers do not leave their vehicles and go straight to the designated pick up station, there is no issue of customer vehicle queuing at a pick up station that is different from that of orders placed. Accordingly, there is no need in Domain of having Jenkins' employee on foot carrying a wireless transceiver communicating the order of customer queuing. Furthermore, such an employee would not be able to ensure that a customer who placed a liquor order is in fact the one who receives it because the employee is some distance away from the pickup station (the employee is in Zone 1, and order pickup is in Zone 2) and not aware of what is eventually picked up at the station. Furthermore, as Jenkins specifies, this employee is only responsible for indicating customer vehicle queuing. One skilled in the art would have no motivation to add to the responsibilities of this employee checking to see who gets liquor products, assuming that is possible. In addition, no explanation is provided as to how such an employee would even know what the customer ordered. One skilled in the art would accordingly find no reason to combine the teachings of these references in the manner asserted by the Examiner.

Third, Domain does not disclose or suggest moving the grocery products to the selected loading area for customer pickup responsive to detection of the customer. Domain, by contrast, appears to disclose moving products to a pickup station responsive to placement of an order by the customer. The Examiner contends that this is, however, shown by Jenkins before the customer moves to the final checkout Zone 2. However, as Domain has already triggered movement of products to the pick up area (responsive to placement of an order), there would be no reason whatsoever to do it again using the methods of Jenkins. Such additional triggering would be redundant at best, and most likely confusing and disruptive. Furthermore, as discussed above, there is no need whatsoever of having any further detection of the customer in Domain. One skilled in the art would have no motivation to combine this teaching of Jenkins with the system of Domain.

Independent Claim 1 and Claims 2-10, which depend on Claim 1, are therefore patentable over the cited references.

II. Claims 2 and 3 are Patentable Over the Combination of Domain, Jenkins, Matsumori and Hall

Claim 2 is dependent on Claim 1 and further specifies wherein receiving said order comprises receiving an order at a Web server from a remote client machine operated by said customer. Claim 3 is dependent on Claim 2 and further specifies wherein said client machine comprises a wireless communications device located in a vehicle in which said customer is seated. Neither claim is disclosed or suggested by Domain. As previously mentioned, in Domain's system, customers must verbally identify products desired, and the order clerks then electronically enter the orders. The order clerks must visually verify the identity of customers when, e.g., liquor purchases are made or payment is made using checks. This would not be possible if the customer ordering was done at a remote client machine as disclosed, e.g., by Matsumori, which teaches an Internet based ordering system. (Matsumori further does not disclose or suggest ordering by any wireless device.) Combination of Domain with this reference would mean that Domain's order stations would be replaced by Matsumori's Internet based ordering system, precluding the required visual customer verification. Domain thus would be incompatible with and teaches away from combination with Matsumori.

Furthermore, Jenkins does not disclose or suggest any use of a Web server to receive orders from remote client machines, much less use of a wireless communications device located in a vehicle in which said customer is seated. Jenkins discloses customer ordering in combination with the customer physically inspecting available products. More specifically, a significant part of the Jenkins system is an extensive product display area 42 having an array of many individual containers 44, each having an outer transparent door 52 that can be opened by customers to physically remove and inspect the articles they are considering buying. (col. 3, lines 54-58). Thus, customers can physically inspect items before purchase. This inspection process would, of course, not be possible with any ordering using a remote client machine, much less a wireless device.

The Examiner cited the Hall reference against Claim 3 for disclosing "a client machine comprising a wireless communications and identification device located in a vehicle." Hall

discloses receiving customer orders from customers operating mobile communications devices. Hall, however, is not properly combinable with Domain or Jenkins for the same reasons specified above with Matsumori.

III. Independent Claim 12 is Patentable Over the Combination of Domain and Jenkins

Independent Claim 12 of the application is directed to a method of selling merchandize, which includes detecting presence including a generally unique identifier of said customer a predetermined distance from said given location after readying said product; directing said customer to one of a plurality of a loading stations at said given location responsive to detecting the presence of the customer; and associating said product with said customer and moving said product to said one of a plurality of loading stations for customer pickup responsive to detecting the presence of the customer.

This claim is patentable over the combination of Domain and Jenkins. The Examiner acknowledged that Domain does not disclose (1) the step of directing said customer to one of a plurality of a loading stations at said given location responsive to detecting the presence of the customer, or (2) the step of associating said product with said customer and moving said product to said one of a plurality of loading stations for customer pickup responsive to detecting the presence of the customer. The Examiner relies on Jenkins to cure these deficiencies. Jenkins, however, (1) teaches neither step and (2) is not properly combinable with Domain.

Jenkins, as previously discussed, discloses a checkout area that includes two "zones": Zone 1 and Zone 2. In Zone 1, an employee on foot carrying a wireless transceiver communicates the order of the queue of incoming customer vehicles to another employee at terminal station 30 such that ordered articles are placed on customer order conveyor 32 in accordance with the order of incoming vehicles in Zone 1. Zone 2 is the end of the conveyor 32 and is the final checkout area having a so-called finalizing terminal 34, at which the customer presents his or her credit card to the operator, who then charges the card for the purchase. There is only one loading station (Zone 2), and the sole purpose of the employee with the wireless transceiver it to communicate the order of the customer queue. The employee cannot direct a customer to one of a plurality of a loading stations at said given location responsive to detecting

the presence of the customer for the simple reason that there is only one loading station. In addition, the product cannot be moved to one of a plurality of loading stations for customer pickup responsive to detecting the presence of the customer again for the reason that there is only one loading station.

In addition, the combination to Domain and Jenkins is improper because not only do the references not suggest their combination, they teach away from combination as discussed at length above with respect to Claim 1.

Claim 12 and dependent Claims 13-48 are therefore patentable over the cited references.

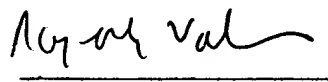
IV. Independent Claim 49 is Patentable Over the Combination of Domain and Jenkins

Independent Claim 49 is directed to a system for selling groceries to customers. This claim is patentable over Domain and Jenkins. Domain does not teach or suggest either (1) a detection apparatus for detecting the arrival including a generally unique identifier of the customer to pickup previously ordered products, or (2) a transfer mechanism responsive to detection of the customer by the detection apparatus for moving the products from the storage area to a loading station at which the customer can pickup the product. The Examiner contends that Jenkins discloses these elements. However, as previously discussed at length, the teachings of Jenkins are not properly combinable with Domain, and the Examiner has simply made an impermissible hindsight reconstruction of Applicant's invention using isolated teachings of the prior art.

Claim 49 and dependent Claims 50-61 are therefore patentable over the cited prior art.

For the reasons set forth above, the rejection of each of Claims 1-61 should be reversed. A listing of the pending claims is set forth in the attached appendix.

Respectfully submitted,


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April 20, 2004

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Claims on Appeal

1. A method of selling groceries, comprising:

receiving an online order from a customer for grocery products the customer desires to pick up at a given location, said order being received from the customer while the customer is at a location remote from said given location;

electronically processing payment information for said order;

retrieving said grocery products from a storage area containing a plurality of such products and maintaining said retrieved grocery products in generally the same temperature conditions as said products were kept in the storage area to inhibit spoilage of said products;

detecting arrival including a generally unique identifier of said customer a predetermined distance from said given location after retrieving said grocery products;

dynamically selecting one of a plurality of loading areas at said given location based on availability and directing said customer to said selected loading area; and

moving said grocery products to said selected loading area for customer pickup responsive to detection of said customer.

2. The method of Claim 1 wherein receiving said order comprises receiving an order at a Web server from a remote client machine operated by said customer.

3. The method of Claim 2 wherein said client machine comprises a wireless communications device located in a vehicle in which said customer is seated.

4. The method of Claim 1 wherein detecting arrival of said customer comprises detecting an identification device located in a vehicle in which said customer is seated.

5. The method of Claim 4 wherein said identification device comprises a transponder.

6. The method of Claim 1 wherein directing said customer comprises displaying information identifying said selected loading area to said customer.
7. The method of Claim 1 wherein moving said grocery products to said selected loading area comprises moving a container containing said products to said loading area.
8. The method of Claim 7 wherein moving said container comprises using an automated transfer mechanism for moving said container.
9. The method of Claim 1 wherein said payment information includes a credit card number of said customer.
10. The method of Claim 1 further comprising separating refrigerated products from room temperature stored products after retrieving said products.
11. The method of Claim 1 further comprising loading said products into a vehicle in which said customer is seated.
12. A method of selling merchandize, comprising:
 - receiving an order from a customer for a product desired to be picked up by the customer at a given location;
 - readying said product for customer pickup at said given location after receipt of said order;
 - detecting presence including a generally unique identifier of said customer a predetermined distance from said given location after readying said product;
 - directing said customer to one of a plurality of loading stations at said given location after detecting presence of the customer; and

associating said product with said customer and moving said product to said one of a plurality of loading stations for customer pickup responsive to detecting the presence of the customer.

13. The method of Claim 12 wherein receiving said order comprises receiving an order at a Web server from a remote client machine operated by said customer.
14. The method of Claim 13 wherein said client machine communicates with said Web server through an Internet connection.
15. The method of Claim 13 wherein said client machine is a personal computer.
16. The method of Claim 13 wherein said client machine is a Web-linked screen phone.
17. The method of Claim 13 wherein said client machine is a communications device having a wireless link to the Internet.
18. The method of Claim 12 wherein said merchandize comprises groceries, and said given location comprises a warehouse.
19. The method of Claim 12 wherein readying said product comprises retrieving said product from a plurality of products located in a general storage area and moving said product to an intermediate temporary storage area.
20. The method of Claim 19 wherein said intermediate storage area has substantially the same ambient temperature conditions as said general storage area to inhibit product spoilage.

21. The method of Claim 12 wherein readying said product comprises placing said product in a container having an identification tag, and associating said tag to said order.
22. The method of Claim 12 wherein detecting presence of said customer comprises detecting an identification device associated with said customer.
23. The method of Claim 22 wherein said identification device comprises a transponder located in a vehicle driven by said customer.
24. The method of Claim 23 wherein detecting said identification device comprises receiving a radio frequency signal emitted by the transponder.
25. The method of Claim 22 wherein detecting said device comprises subjecting said vehicle to infrared radiation and detecting a reflection of said radiation emitted from said device.
26. The method of Claim 12 wherein detecting presence of said customer comprises receiving an input from said customer indicating his or her presence.
27. The method of Claim 26 wherein receiving an input comprises receiving an input on a keypad identifying said customer.
28. The method of Claim 26 wherein receiving an input comprises using a machine reader to read a card associated with the customer having information identifying said customer magnetically stored therein.
29. The method of Claim 12 wherein directing said customer comprises displaying information identifying said loading station to said customer.

30. The method of Claim 12 wherein readying said product comprises placing said product in a container, and wherein moving said product to said loading station comprises moving said container containing said product to said loading station.
31. The method of Claim 30 wherein said container comprises:
- a container body including an interior space for holding the merchandize;
 - a microprocessor-controlled electronic display mounted on the container body for displaying information relating to ordered merchandize;
 - an input device for inputting the information to be displayed on said display; and
 - an identification tag having a unique identifier on said body.
32. The method of Claim 30 wherein moving said container comprises using an automated transfer mechanism for moving said container.
33. The method of Claim 32 wherein said automated transfer mechanism includes a conveyor mechanism.
34. The method of Claim 30 further comprising detecting whether said customer is attempting to leave said given location with said container, and if so, alerting said customer to return said container.
35. The method of Claim 12 wherein said steps are automated.
36. The method of Claim 12 further comprising registering said customer prior to receiving said order.
37. The method of Claim 36 wherein registering said customer comprises receiving from said customer username and password information.

38. The method of Claim 36 wherein registering said customer includes receiving contact information from said customer.
39. The method of Claim 36 wherein registering said customer includes receiving buyer profile information from said customer.
40. The method of Claim 12 further comprising receiving payment information from said customer.
41. The method of Claim 40 wherein said payment information includes a credit card number of said customer.
42. The method of Claim 12 further comprising dynamically selecting a loading station from one of a plurality of loading stations prior to directing the customer to the loading station.
43. The method of Claim 42 wherein said loading station is selected based on availability.
44. The method of Claim 42 wherein said loading station is selected based on which one of said loading stations is available for use or which one is most underutilized.
45. The method of Claim 12 further comprising loading the product into a vehicle driven by the customer at the loading station.
46. The method of Claim 12 further comprising receiving from the customer information on approximately what time the customer wishes to pick up the product.
47. The method of Claim 46 further comprising charging the customer a fee based on when the customer wishes to pick up the ordered product.

48. The method of Claim 12 further comprising dynamically calculating a price for said product and indicating said price to said customer.
49. A system for selling groceries to customers, comprising:
- a computer for receiving an order for grocery products from a customer;
 - a storage area containing different groceries including the grocery products ordered by the customer;
 - a plurality of loading stations at which groceries can be loaded into customer vehicles;
 - detection apparatus for detecting the arrival including a generally unique identifier of the customer to pickup previously ordered products; and
 - a transfer mechanism responsive to detection of the customer by the detection apparatus for moving the products from the storage area to a loading station at which the customer can pickup the product.
50. The system of claim 49 wherein the computer comprises a Web server.
51. The system of claim 49 wherein said storage area comprises a main storage area and a temporary intermediate storage area, said intermediate storage area being used for storing products retrieved from the main storage area and readied for customer pickup.
52. The system of claim 49 wherein said storage area comprises an area for storing refrigerated goods, an area for storing frozen goods, and an area for storing goods at room temperature.
53. The system of claim 49 wherein said storage area is part of a multi-storied building and said different groceries are stored on various floors of said building.

54. The system of claim 49 further comprising means for dynamically assigning loading stations to arriving customers.
55. The system of claim 49 wherein said detection apparatus comprises a reader for reading data from an identification device associated with each customer.
56. The system of claim 55 wherein said identification device comprises a transponder.
57. The system of claim 55 wherein said identification device comprises an identification card and said apparatus comprises a card reader.
58. The system of claim 49 further comprising a plurality of detection stations, each including a detection apparatus.
59. The system of claim 49 wherein each loading station includes a detection apparatus.
60. The system of claim 49 wherein the transfer system comprises a container locating mechanism for locating a container in which said product is stored and transporters leading from the storage area to the loading stations for transferring the container from the storage area to a loading station.
61. The system of claim 49 further comprising a plurality of containers for storing ordered products, wherein each container comprises:
- a container body including an interior space for holding the merchandize;
 - a microprocessor-controlled electronic display mounted on the container body for displaying information relating to ordered merchandize;
 - an input device for inputting the information to be displayed on said display; and
 - an identification tag having a unique identifier on said body.